

THE CATHOLIC POST CHAPLAIN'S WORK
WITH DEPENDENTS AND CIVILIANS

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33

(60-1)
(May, 1960)

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INTRODUCTION

Since the close of World War II, the United States has maintained a much larger standing Army than ever before in its history. As a result of this larger military establishment, chaplains on military posts, both in Continental United States and in overseas areas have had to reassess their work-loads and face new problems. Among other changes brought in to being by the expansion of the Armed Forces is a tremendous increase in the number of dependents and other civilians who are resident on or adjacent to military reservations. In most instances these people look to the military chaplain as their spiritual shepherd.

This situation has brought a new challenge and an additional workload to the chaplain. Here we will look at this challenge and these additional duties from the viewpoint of a Catholic chaplain doing pastoral work. We may note here that the chaplain is obligated not only by his sense of duty as a clergyman but also by Army regulation and policy to give spiritual care to this large group of civilians. Regulations state, "Each chaplain will, so far as practicable, insure that the religious and moral needs of all military and civilian personnel of the command and their dependents are adequately met."⁽¹⁾ Army policy states, "Though his first responsibility is to military personnel, the chaplain must exercise care and solicitude for their dependents."⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾AR 165-15, Religious Activities, 7 June 1955, Para 3.

⁽²⁾FM 16-5, The Chaplain, 15 April 1958, Para 11.

As will be seen from the table of contents, we will discuss this subject under seven major headings. In each chapter we will bring out the work to be done, the means needed for its accomplishment and difficulties to be encountered. We will suggest ways to use the means, overcome the difficulties and perform the duty well.

CHAPTER I
THE SACRAMENTS AND THE MASS

One of the primary obligations of the Catholic chaplain as a priest of his church is to administer the Sacraments and to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Although he would have to perform these functions if he were dealing only with troops, the addition of dependents and other civilians brings complications. Let us briefly look at the Sacraments, the Mass and allied subjects to see how this comes about.

1. BAPTISM

In caring for only troops the chaplain might perform ten or twelve adult baptisms a year. Where there are also dependents, however, there will be a steady crop of babies, and Catholic doctrine teaches that these are to be baptized as soon as practical after birth.

In baptizing troops the chaplain may work with field expedients, but mothers expect the niceties to be found in their home parishes. So one of the first obligations of the chaplain is to see to it that he has available in a suitable place a fitting baptismal font with the proper brass or gold vessels to go with it. Normally, the Chaplains' Fund will provide the wherewithal to purchase this equipment.

The next problem is one of jurisdiction. The Catholic Church has strict rules about the rights of pastors to perform the baptisms of their subjects, except in case of emergency. By his faculties from the Military Ordinariate, the chaplain has the authority to baptize military personnel and those dependents residing with them. He has the same authority over those civilians who actually reside on a military reservation. The difficulty arises with those civilians living off post,

perhaps working on post and habitually attending religious services on post. The chaplain has no jurisdiction over them, and must obtain permission from their civilian pastor before baptizing them.

Another recurring problem is found in the choice of sponsors or godparents. The sponsors at baptism takes on definite duties in seeing to the religious upbringing of their godchildren. Since most military families are stationed far from those friends and relatives who would normally undertake this duty, there arises the problem of finding competent sponsors. Sponsors can be represented by proxies, but only after written authorization from the actual sponsors. Since the baptism will normally take place before this written permission can be obtained after birth, the chaplain must be alert to forewarn prospective parents, and have them obtain the necessary papers from the sponsors before the birth of the child.

Catholic Church regulations require that at least one name taken at baptism must be the name of a saint. There is a trend today away from the simple names of past generations to other names, either totally unconnected with the name of a saint or remotely derived from a saint's name. The chaplain will need to keep on hand an approved listing of names to settle borderline cases.

Records of Catholic military baptisms are sent to the Military Ordinariate in New York as the place of permanent record. Whenever a civilian child is baptized with its pastor's permission, however, the record is sent to the civilian parish, and the Ordinariate receives an

information copy that includes the name and address of the church of permanent record.

2. FIRST COMMUNION AND CONFIRMATION

These two Sacraments are normally received in childhood. The chaplain working with troops only will give First Communion in private to adults and will arrange for them to go to a local bishop for Confirmation.

With dependents on the scene the chaplain's duty assumes larger proportions. Each year he will prepare a First Holy Communion class of children, and every year or two a Confirmation class. On larger posts, the Confirmation class will be an annual event. We will take up the training of these classes in the chapter on religious education. Here we will look at other aspects.

Neither of these Sacraments may be administered unless the child involved produces a certificate of baptism. With military dependents coming from all over the world, one of the major projects in dealing with these Sacraments is to obtain the necessary certificates of baptism. In many cases the parents will not recall exactly where the child was baptized. In any case, the chaplain must start months in advance to collect these vital papers.

The customary diplomas must be purchased and filled out. A fitting celebration must be arranged, usually a Communion breakfast for the First Communicants and a buffet for those who have been confirmed.

On a larger post arrangements may be made for a bishop to come to the post and administer the Sacrament of Confirmation. On a smaller post where there will be fewer children it will usually be better to find out

when the local civilian parish is having Confirmation and make arrangements for the military children to participate in this ceremony.

For Confirmation sponsors must be chosen, normally one man to stand up for the men and boys and a lady to stand up for the women and girls. Some parents, from lands where the custom exists, will insist on individual sponsors for their children. The chaplain must exercise care to see that only worthy Catholics are selected for this important office.

Normally when children receive First Communion they are at the same time enrolled in the brown scapular and the miraculous medal, two of the sacramentals of the Catholic Church. The chaplain will need to lay in a supply of these articles and perform the required blessing and enrollment.

It is the custom in our country for children receiving First Holy Communion or Confirmation to wear special clothes. In many cases, it is difficult to obtain these articles of clothing in the vicinity of a military post. The chaplain must facilitate the obtaining of these articles.

3. MATRIMONY

The biggest headache of the chaplain working with dependents and civilians is the Sacrament of Matrimony. Working only with troops he will have very few marriages except in overseas areas. Ordinarily the soldier will be married in the parish church of his civilian bride.

One major problem in marriage is jurisdiction. The chaplain is quite limited in his jurisdiction over marriages. It would take far too long to go deeply into the subject here. In fact, a monograph could be written on this one topic. Suffice, it to say, that the first duty of the

chaplain is to make certain that he has jurisdiction before performing the ceremony.

The next problem is civil regulations. They differ greatly from state to state, and can become even more complicated in an overseas assignment. The chaplain must be sure that both he and the couple to be married have fully complied with the civil law of the place of the marriage.

Before performing a marriage, the Catholic chaplain must take many preliminary steps. One of these is to make sure that both parties are free to marry. This can involve a lot of correspondence. Next comes the necessary preliminary instruction. This will be taken up in the chapter on religious education. As in the case of First Communion and Confirmation, certain documents must be obtained before the ceremony. Also in many cases it will be necessary to obtain a dispensation from the proper ecclesiastical authority.

One of the tasks of the Catholic chaplain dealing with civilians will be the validation of invalid marriages. An invalid marriage is one involving a Catholic which does not comply with the laws of the church. The Army is loaded with them. Some can be validated. Others cannot. In any case, they will be very time consuming, involving much letter writing and, in most cases, the preparation of a law case to be presented to an ecclesiastical marriage court.

As in the case of the other Sacraments, the proper records must be sent either to the Military Ordinariate or another correct office of record.

4. THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

Whether dealing with troops alone or with both troops and civilians, the Catholic chaplain must hear confessions and forgive sins. The addition of the dependents adds only a couple of complications. Since a man's confession may be heard anywhere, no special preparations must be made for the troops. Women's confessions, however, must be heard in a confessional unless she is confined by illness. So when dependents enter the picture, the chaplain must see to it that he has a proper confessional. Also, confessions must be scheduled not only at hours convenient for the troops but also at times convenient for the dependents and other civilians.

5. CARE OF THE SICK

Ordinarily the sick soldier is in a military hospital where he will be cared for by the hospital chaplain and visited occasionally by his unit chaplain; but families will have elderly members or invalids. The chaplain will have the duty of bringing Holy Communion to these people at regular intervals. He must also be available to administer the last rites of the church to these people when it becomes necessary.

6. VOCATIONS

Where there are young men and young ladies there will be vocations to the priesthood, the sisterhood or the brotherhood. The chaplain must stand ready to foster these vocations by advice, encouragement and instruction. He must also be prepared to supply information about seminaries, religious orders, entrance requirements, financial obligations, etc.

7. THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

The Catholic chaplain has the obligation of providing Mass for troops, dependents and civilians. The addition of the dependents and civilians bring about the need for certain niceties as in the case of baptism. Although the chaplain can celebrate Mass for the troops on the hood of a jeep, if necessary, the families will expect an atmosphere closer to that to which they were accustomed in their home parishes.

First of all they will expect a place where the Blessed Sacrament will be reserved for their visits. They will look for statues, shrines, Canonically erected Stations of the Cross and an atmosphere conducive to prayer.

Army regulations state, "At times when formal religious services are not scheduled, the chapel should be available for private prayer and meditation. Chapels built with public funds are available for use by all denominations represented in the command and will not be designated for the exclusive use of any one denomination." Also, "Religious symbols and equipment having denominational significance will be so installed that they be removed or covered when not in use by the denomination or group concerned."⁽³⁾ Nevertheless many commanders have taken a realistic view of the needs of Catholic personnel and have unofficially designated certain chapels for temporary use by Catholics. The temporary use goes on and on. In this case the Blessed Sacrament can be reserved, statues can be set up and adorned and the Stations of the Cross can be canonically

⁽³⁾SR 210-10-50, Installations, Chapels, 7 December 1951, Par 4 and 6.

erected. In other places where a shortage of chapels precludes this, a room can usually be found somewhere on the post that may be devoted to this purpose. The Catholic chaplain must make every effort to set up a Blessed Sacrament Chapel on the post, since the Military Ordinariate, which has ecclesiastical control of all Catholic military chaplains, requires the chaplain to reserve the Blessed Sacrament.⁽⁴⁾

In the event that he accomplishes this task, the chaplain will inherit more obligations. He must see to the security of the Sacred Species by means of a suitable tabernacle whose key is properly guarded. He will also see to it that a sanctuary lamp is constantly burning before the Blessed Sacrament.

⁽⁴⁾ Francis Cardinal Spellman, Vademecum for the Priests Serving the Military Vicariate of the United States of America, New York, Military Ordinariate, November 1957, page 9.

CHAPTER II
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Another field complicated by the presence of dependents and other civilians is the field of religious education. We will consider this under two headings: the education of children, and adult education.

1. THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

Where there are children the chaplain has the obligation of providing for their religious education.

It is the ideal of the Catholic Church that the best education for its children is to be found in the Catholic school where religious training is an essential part of the curriculum. So the chaplain will first of all seek out Catholic schools that will accept his dependent children as pupils. Due to the overcrowded condition of most Catholic schools, this may be a major problem. The persevering chaplain, however, can usually locate such a school in most parts of this country.

Once he has found the school, the next problem is transportation. This problem is solved in different ways on different posts. It depends on the post commander. If the commander is willing, Army regulations permit him to use Army buses for this purpose.⁽⁵⁾ If the commander is uncooperative, it may be necessary to hire a bus out of the Chaplains' Fund to carry the children.

⁽⁵⁾ AR 58-30, Motor Transportation, The Transportation of Dependent School Children, 23 August 1957, Par 7.

In most parts of the country, Catholic schools charge tuition. The payment of this tuition will be a great hardship for some, e.g., a sergeant with six children of school age. On many posts arrangements are made to donate one Sunday's collection each month to the parochial school to lower the tuition of pupils from the post.

Despite all the chaplain's efforts to obtain parochial school education for the children, about two thirds of the parents will use financial reasons as an excuse for not complying with the church's law, and will send their children to public schools. The chaplain must provide religious instruction for these children on the post, either through Sunday School or through catechetical instruction during the week.

In this case, his first problem will be to obtain qualified teachers. He will try to obtain the services of sisters from a nearby convent, if possible. This is the ideal arrangement, if it can be made. If the chaplain is able to get sisters to teach, he must arrange for money from his fund to pay them. He must also arrange their transportation to and from classes. In most cases, he will be able to arrange for Army transportation to handle this. Where this cannot be done, he can either get volunteers from his congregation to perform this task or hire public transportation.

In some cases, the chaplain will be unable to obtain the services of sisters or will be only able to get a part of his teaching staff from that source. In this case, he will need lay teachers. Because of the frequent turnover of military personnel this involves difficulties.

The first difficulty will be that of training teachers. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine will assist the chaplain in this duty, if he organizes it on his post. The next difficulty, that of obtaining volunteers to teach, can only be solved by the energy and personality of the chaplain.

In addition to his problem of finding and training instructors, there are many other things for the chaplain to do. He must develop a program, provide catechetical texts and training aids and obtain the use of a building or buildings for the classes. How he handles this will depend on conditions at the individual post. Normally it is not too difficult.

In planning his catechetical instruction the chaplain will include special classes for those who are to make their First Holy Communion or Confirmation.

One last problem in regard to catechetical instruction is the transportation of the children to and from the classes. On most posts this will be no difficulty since the post will provide Army buses for this purpose.

2. ADULT EDUCATION

It is not enough to provide catechetical instruction for the children. The Catholic chaplain must also provide religious instruction for adults.

First of all, he must provide classes for inquirers: for those who wish to investigate the Catholic Faith. Then he must take care of poorly instructed Catholics. He must instruct those who have never made

their First Communion or Confirmation. For the practical Catholic who wishes to improve his knowledge of his faith, the chaplain will provide religious discussion clubs.

The chaplain can never get away from the problems of marriage. He must provide matrimonial instruction. There is a definite set of instructions for those about to enter mixed marriages. There are canonical instructions for all marriages. Where possible, he can arrange Cana and pre-Cana conferences. These are formal instructions on the religious, medical, social, and psychological aspects of marriage, given by experts in the individual fields. The Cana conferences are for those already married, and the pre-Cana conferences for those planning marriage.

Finally, the chaplain will plan well-rounded courses of sermons for the instruction of his people.

CHAPTER III

SOCIETIES

Just as the civilian parish would be incomplete without its confraternities and religious societies, so the military parish must provide for the spiritual welfare and growth of its members by using these valuable aids.

Obviously space cannot be given in this short paper to go into great detail about the individual societies. So here we will merely mention some that have been found useful by Catholic chaplains, and give a brief description of each.

The chief society for the men will be the Holy Name Society. The chaplain would probably organize this even if he had no dependents to think of. The Holy Name Society aims to increase Christian virtues in its members and to provide them with social life under ecclesiastical sponsorship. It also provides the chaplain with a pool of manpower for his various projects.

These are two societies for ladies that have been very successful on military posts. The first is the altar society. This group does the necessary sewing, washing, ironing and decorating to keep the chapel, the altar, the shrines and the altar linens clean and beautiful. The other organization for ladies is the Sodality of Our Lady with its two-fold purpose of personal sanctity and active Catholicity. If desired, the altar society may be made a branch of the Sodality.

For mixed adult groups there are still other societies available. The first of these, of course, is the choir. Nothing beautifies a religious

service more than fine music. The Legion of Mary is a selected small group which assists the chaplain in his spiritual work. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, which we mentioned earlier, develops teachers, clerical workers, baby sitters and fishers for the children's catechetical program.

For the boys the chaplain may want to establish a Junior Holy Name Society. He will certainly want to train a corps of altar boys. The Children of Mary is a fine organization for the girls. Both boys and girls might be interested in a junior choir or a junior presidium of the Legion of Mary.

In addition to his own parochial organizations, the chaplain will be expected to take an interest in certain post-wide groups such as the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, the Teen-age Club, the PTA, the Officers' Wives Club, the NCO Wives Club, the Post Nursery and the Post Kindergarten. All these organizations will provide him with a contact with souls. He will take advantage of as many of them as he deems feasible.

CHAPTER IV

SPECIAL DEVOTIONS

The presence of dependents and civilians on the military post makes it almost mandatory for the chaplain to provide a program of devotions far more complete than would be practical for troops in the field.

Each year he will have a preaching mission, sometimes in conjunction with the other major faiths as a part of a Tri-Faith Religious Emphasis Week, and sometimes as a separate Catholic activity. On a large post, he will have separate weeks for the men and the women and an after-school mission for the children. In a small place all will be combined into one.

On certain festivals or holy days of the liturgical year, he will also want to provide a full program. He will have public recitation of the Stations of the Cross on the Fridays of Lent, a full Holy Week program with organized adoration on Holy Thursday and Good Friday. He will have the blessing of the candles on the Feast of the Purification, the blessing of throats on the Feast of St. Blase, the distribution of blessed ashes on Ash Wednesday, a May Procession, A Corpus Christi Procession and other such ceremonies.

He will want to have a weekly Novena service and a monthly Holy Hour. He will also want to make it possible for his people to attend days of recollection and weekend retreats in civilian retreat houses.

CHAPTER V

LITERATURE AND RELIGIOUS ARTICLES

To promote a full Catholic life among the families on the post, the Catholic chaplain will try to provide them with the best of Catholic literature. He will distribute Catholic newspapers each Sunday. He will have many subscriptions to the leading Catholic magazines. His pamphlet racks will be filled with good reading material for all ages and both sexes. He will publish a weekly bulletin to keep his people aware of his religious and social program. He will supply his people with Catholic calendars showing the feasts of the church and the days of fast and abstinence.

When funds are sufficiently large some Catholic chaplains find it spiritually profitable to operate a chapel lending library, featuring the best of Catholic literature.

In addition to his distribution of literature, the Catholic chaplain will keep a supply of missals in the pews of his chapel. He will also have available for distribution some of the more common religious articles, such as rosaries, medals and scapulars. In civilian life, families are accustomed to purchase these things in religious goods stores, but over the course of the years a tradition has grown in the military that the chaplain will supply the less expensive of these articles from his fund.

CHAPTER VI

COUNSELING

The chaplain working only with troops will find the majority of those seeking counsel falling into rather common categories. How often he hears, "My first sergeant doesn't like me. Can you get me transferred to another outfit?" Another regular is, "My family badly needs my help at home. Is there any way I can get out of the Army?" These and a few more familiar patterns will constitute most of the chaplain's counseling activities.

With the addition of dependents and civilians to his care, the chaplain's counseling problems also multiply. Matrimonial problems will take up a great deal of his time. Alcoholic husbands and/or wives, problem children, gambling away the month's pay, squabbles between neighbors and many similar problems will have to be taken care of.

The chaplain must also be prepared to counsel abnormalities. He will encounter cases of homosexuality, neurosis and scrupulosity. In dealing with these he must work hand in glove with the psychiatrist or psychological expert on the hospital staff.

The chaplain will have to deal with the fostering of religious vocations and counseling for marriage. He must counsel sensitive souls from sheltered backgrounds, troubled by the evil they see around them in the Army. He will have to be prepared to advise parents on movies unfit to be seen by children, since most military posts show a large proportion of movies approved only for the mature.

Since each day will bring its new crop of counseling cases, the chaplain will have to prepare himself well to carry out this most important facet

of his work. Fortunately there are many good books on the subject available today.

CHAPTER VII

OTHER PASTORAL DUTIES

In addition to the duties enumerated in the preceding chapters, many other pastoral duties will fall on the shoulders of the Catholic chaplain who works with dependents and other civilians.

The saddest of these is the burial of the dead. Since most military families are comparatively young, the greater part of his burials will be of still-born children. These occasions give the chaplain an opportunity to offer compassion, comfort and consolation to the bereaved families.

In the chapter on the sacraments, we mentioned the duty of bringing Holy Communion to the sick, and of administering the last rites of the church. In addition to these minimal duties, the chaplain must pay additional visits to the sick dependents and civilians either in their homes or in hospitals, bringing with him the comforts of religion.

Although military families for the most part receive an adequate wage, crises will come in the lives of people when they are desperately in need of money. Usually the chaplain is unable to contribute any large amount from his own pocket, but he must be prepared to refer these unfortunates to agencies that will be able to help them. On post, he will have the Red Cross, Army Emergency Relief, and, in some cases, Civilian Emergency Relief. Off post, he may be able to get them help from the local diocesan charitable bureau or from the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

Another task of the Catholic post chaplain will be the reaching of drifters. There will be many families who were comparatively faithful in practicing their religion in their home parishes, who become very careless

in the military. It is the chaplain's duty to trace these families down and attempt to motivate them to return to the practice of their faith.

The priest is also expected to be an intellectual and cultural leader in his community. He must encourage his young people to scholarship and to higher studies. He should also hold out cultural ideals to his parishioners.

Not the least of the chaplain's duties will be that of giving parties. He will be expected to conduct such affairs as an Easter egg hunt, a Christmas party, a parish picnic, an altar boy outing, Communion breakfasts for the First Communicants and the Holy Name Society, a buffet for those who have been confirmed, an annual banquet for the Sodality and Holy Name Society, and other sundry affairs such as bake sales and card parties. He will also be asked to help out with post parties such as the children's Halloween Party and the Post Christmas Party.

The Catholic chaplain will also maintain liaison with the local bishop and the civilian priests in the vicinity of his installation. They will be able to assist him in carrying out his program and will be of assistance to his military parishioners in many ways.

Doubtless a deeper search and more lengthy consideration would unearth many other responsibilities that come to the Catholic post chaplain due to the addition of dependents and other civilians to his flock, but the ones I have mentioned are the principal ones and will serve our purpose in this monograph.

CONCLUSION

As can be seen from the preceding chapters, the duties of the Catholic chaplain, working with dependents and civilians as well as the troops, is never done.

An additional complication arises from the fact that one of the chaplain's primary duties is to be a staff officer. Regulations state, "The chaplain is the commander's staff advisor and consultant on all matters which influence or pertain to the religious life, morals and morale of all personnel in the command."⁽⁶⁾ That means that when the troops go to the field, the chaplain is expected to accompany them. In this case, unless he is able to get another chaplain or a civilian priest to supply essential services at the post, the chaplain is torn between two duties. He must either cut off his pastoral work for the dependents, civilians and those troops left at home, or else let his troops go on bivouac without him. The decision on this matter is left to the commander. No matter who makes the decision, it is always a difficult one.

The Catholic chaplain on today's military post has a difficult task to perform. He cannot hope to do it alone, but will need the active cooperation of fervent laymen. With their assistance the chaplain who will sacrifice his own ease for the benefit of his parishioners, whose sense of duty leads him to put out a little extra for the welfare of his flock, and whose zeal impels him to give first place to salvation and sanctification of souls, will gain great satisfaction from the proper carrying out of the duties we have enumerated in this monograph.

⁽⁶⁾AR 165-15, Religious Activities, 7 June 1955, Para 2b.

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